OUR FICTION MAGAZINE

FOOLING BLAIR

EVERYBODY thought that Jack Blair had the inside track with the Storys, from gruff old William Story to inquisitive Billy Story, to say nothing of Mrs. Story and Bell herself, and it was the inside track with Bell that Jack sought.

Fred Widmer passed him close for advantage, but Blair was the more popular with the elders as he was independently rich and Fred was dependent upon the salary he received as manager for the Automatic machine company.

It was not a very large salary as yet, for the company was a new one, and though it seemed destined to revolutionize certain lines of industry with the application of its new methods, the industries, as yet, had refused to be revolutionized and the fight promised to be a long, hard one.

Blair, counting upon parental support, regarded with mild disdain Bell's slight preference for Widmer and was graciously patronizing to his rival.

Blair was offensive in his patronage, as he was offensive in his lovemaking. He had been accustomed from childhood to regard money as the magical wand that can conjure up the heart's desires.

He had sought to impress the elder Storys with his wealth, instead of suing for Bell's favor, and so Widmer, with his boyish good humor and tender reverence for the woman he loved, had gained at least one point against his rival. Bell favored his suit, though it seemed a hopeless case, with both parents in favor of Blair.

Then came the vacation season, and Bell announced that no one

BELL.

should know of the place selected. She had had a hard winter, between fighting for Fred and against Blair, and she wanted to rest and be alone.

Blair smiled his acquiescence and sought Mrs. Story for advice. Mrs. Story hemmed and hawed until Blair grew angry.

"You needn't tell me if you don't want to," he exclaimed with icy politeness. "I thought I might just happen to be there, and I could show Miss Bell a good time. Of course if you don't want me—"

"I do," cried Mrs. Story, "but you see I don't know myself. Bell wants to go to the springs, I want to go to the shore, and William insists on the mountains. Of course, we shall end by going to the shore."

"Then I think I'll go to the shore," decided Blair. "If you don't happen to come then I'll go on to the Springs and follow to the mountains."

Mrs. Story nodded her approval of this idea and so it happened that Blair spent two evry comfortable weeks at Atlantic City before he began to worry.

Then he spent two uncomfortable weeks up and down the coast and, as neither hotel nor boarding house developed a sign of the Storys, he made for Saratoga. Another two weeks in the mountains and Blair headed for home.

The Storys' house was boarded up—and there was no sign of life. Blair went past the place three times and then mounted the steps and rang the bell. There was no answer and at last he beat a retreat.

He was in no pleasant frame of mind and he made for the park to sit in the shade and think it over. He had written Mrs. Story half a dozen times and his bill for telegrams was nearly $50. Neither to letter nor wire had he received a reply and there was no mail at the apartments.

Mrs. Story had played him false. He thought of the gifts he had lavished on the traitress and ground his teeth.

He hunted up Widmer's place of business in the faint hope that he might know something, but the office boy reported that Widmer had gone on a vacation and he did not know what his address was nor when he would return.

Blocked at every point, Blair could only give up the search for the moment and seek forgetfulness in other diversions. He took in a roof garden and was bored by the performance.

As he left the place when the last act was half over he strolled down the street to see an electric cab whisk past containing the perfidious Storys. Bell was not with them, but there was no mistaking the fat complacency of William Story nor the childish pride of his spouse.

There was no cab handy, and Blair jumped aboard a car and reached the house almost as quickly. It was still boarded up, and repeated pressures on the push botton elicited no response.

For half an hour Blair patrolled the street in front of the house, then a private watchman warned him away, and as he did not care to offer explanation he had to go.

The next morning as he was dressing he glanced out of the window, and on a passing car behind Mrs. Story in an end seat on the open car, and next to her was Billy. It was easy to imagine that Bell and her father were further along on the seat, and with a scrowling face Blair went down to breakfast.

Now he was certain that they were in town and hiding from him, and he determined to find them if he had to engage the services of detectives. It was a dirty trick, he told himself, and the more he thought about it the more angry he grew.

Half a dozen times that afternoon he passed the Story home, and each time the temptation to press the button was too strong to be resisted. There was no answer, and Blair went sullenly to dinner, and later in the evening he resumed his watch.

This time he had not been on guard 10 minutes when he beheld Billy hurrying toward him carrying

THE STORY KIDS.

a huge pitcher. He smiled on Blair as he approached and shouted greeting.

"Looking for us?" he cried. "I guess ma'll let you come in."

"I scarcely think so," responded Blair coldly. "I rang for about five minutes."

"We took the wires off the bell," explained Billy with another grin. "You have to go down to the basement and knock five times. We're on a vacation. You've been missin' lots of fun.

"You see, pa wanted to go to the mountains and ma wanted to go to the shore. Ma most always gets her way, but pa gave in last year, and he said that he'd go to the mountains or he'd go nowhere. Ma, she said she'd go to Atlantic City or she'd go nowhere. Pa, he smiles and says 'all right. We'll play the second choice. We'll go nowhere.' Then we boarded up the house and we're livin' out in the backyard in tents half the time, and the other half the time we live on the roof. We have ice cream for dinner every day, and we rush the pitcher to the soda fountain for root beer when we stay home. It costs a lot of money to go away, and pa's spending that on fun instead. We wrote you to come back."

"I never got the letter," said Blair acidly.

"Not even the invitation to Bell's wedding?" asked Billy in surprise. "It's one of that sort of invitations that you get after it happens. Fred Widmer took Bell out for a trolley ride and they came back married. He said Bell wanted to go to Saratoga and that was as good a place as any for a honeymoon."

For a moment Blair was speechless, then he said romehting under his breath.

"What did you say?" asked Billy, regarding him with mild curiosity. He had never seen Blair look like that before.

"I said there was such a thing as being too diplomatic," explained Blair, editing out the dashes on the boy's account. "You tell your mother I won't come in. I don't feel mother I won't come in. I don't fell

Billy, suddenly remembering his soda, hurried into the house, and Blair headed for his apartments where he could comfortably curse the strategy by which he hoped to steal a march on his rival and the stubbornness of the Storys.

A FARMER BOY

THE cold November downpour drove even Tom Blake to an overcrowded street car. There remained one unoccupied strap, to which he attached himself.

He looked grimly over the dripping, anxious passengers to the rainswept vistas of the avenue, and his heart was filled with a longing for the green fields and the meadow lands of his home.

"What a miserable grind city life is!" he thought. "How anyone can choose it is beyond me, and how much worse for a woman—a working woman—even than a man."

He looked at the drabbled skirt of a young girl in the seat opposite, at her old-fashioned hat and her cheap little imitations of prevailing styles.

By force of contrast came to his memory the vision of a slender slip of a girl in a dress of peach-pink, standing knee deep in a field of daisies. With a shudder he tried to realize her environed by ribbon counter or office desk.

Then he fell to wondering as he had so many times of late, what had come between him and this same slip of a girl since he had left the farm. She had been away from home on a visit when he came to the city, and had not replied to the long letter he had left for her. To the letter he had written from here had come in reply only a formal little note, and then, unbroken silence.

"There's a seat!" growled the conductor, brushing past him, and Tom noted that during his reverie there had been many exits. When he was seated, he recalled the still unopened letter in his pocket, and he proceeded to open it.

It was from his cousin and housekeeper, Julia. At the close he read: "Have you seen Bessie yet? She has taken a fine position in an office in the city. Gets a big salary, and never wants to come back to the country again. It seems she learned typewriting while she was at her aunt Laura's."

Tom looked dejectedly out of the window. His world seemed upside down. He was vaguely conscious of someone occupying the seat beside him, and then the voice of his dreams spoke.

"You haven't forgotten old friends so soon."

He turned and looked into Bessie's blue eyes.

"I just learned from a letter that you were here. Why did you come—"

"I had a longing for city life, same as you had, so I got a position here."

His face darkened.

"You don't seem to be pleased," she said, flushing.

"No Bessie; I am not. I don't like to think of you as anywhere but back there in the green fields. I wish we were both there this minute."

She looked incredulous.

"You'd give up your active, stirring life here? I thought you were entirely weaned away from green fields."

He stared at her wonderingly.

"Will you tell me when you came, where your position is, where you live, and why you did not let me know you were here?"

"I came here three days ago. I do typewriting in the law office of Boardman & Livingston. I board at 227 Morton ave."

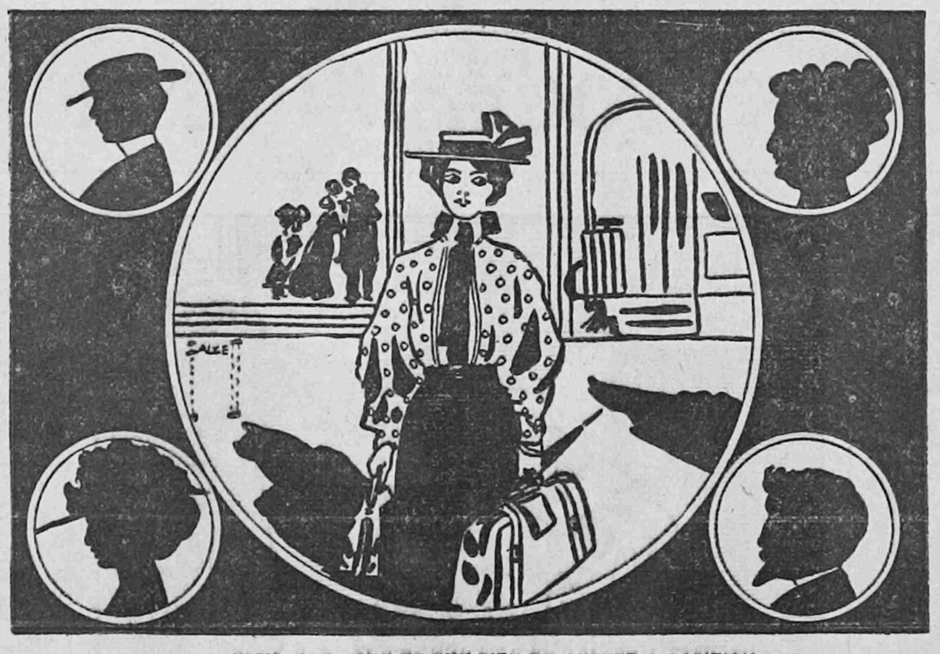
"That is in the same block where my boarding house it—but my last question, Bessie!"

I didn't suppose you would care to know."

"Bessie!"

Just then a woman, weary and old, came into the car, and Tom instantly gave her his seat and hung on to a strap until one of the two men seated in front of Bessie left the car. He slipped into this seat, looking keenly at his companion.

"Isn't your name Weldon—George Weldon?"



BESSIE HAD GONE TO THE CITY TO ACCEPT A POSITION

"Yes," said the man, extending his hand. "I was almost sure it was you, Blake, and I was wondering why you seem to be living here, and how for off your thoughts were."

"They were only back to the farm."

"I don't wonder. You are a born farmer. Will you tell me why you left that fine 600-acre farm your father bequeathed you? I should think you'd ask nothing better."

"I don't. I am here to fit myself to run it; that is, scientifically. I came here a couple of months ago to attend the Agricultural college and take a six-months' course."

"Good idea!" Live at the college?"

"No, they were crowded when I came, so I board out here in the suburbs."

"Enjoying the city life out of school hours?"

"No; I study evenings. I want to crowd as much in these six months as I can. I know no one here, and I don't care to make any acquaintances for so short a time. I tell you, Weldon, the green fields will look pretty good to me next spring."

Weldon looked as if he had heard enough of his old time acquaintance's affairs, but Tom insistently continued

"I had always wanted to take this course, and one day when September harvesting was well under way, I just packed my grip and came on a moment's notice."

"Morton av!" bawled the conductor.

Tom helped Bessie off the car, and they went down the avenue under the same unbrella.

"Tom," she said shyly, "I heard all you said to that man!"

"I raised my voice so you should. It was to you I was talking. I think I bored Weldon."

"When I came home from Aunt Laura's I heard you had come here. I went to your house and your cousin, Julia, told me you had gone because you were tired of farm life."

"But she surely gave you the long letter I left for you!"

"No; not even a message. Then came your note from the college, and well, I didn't write again, because every time I saw Julia, she said she had heard from you and that you were having such a gay time, that you lived in a big boarding house and were going to theaters and—"

Tom's laugh rang out lustily.

"I am at a big boarding house, but as yet only know one man to speak to. Haven't been to a theater—we will go to one tonight."

Her laugh was mirthful but a little apologetic.

"I ought to have seen the method in Julia's madness."

"Tell me why you came here, Bessie?"

"I was so lonesome, I couldn't stay there. My uncle got me this position."

"And you like it so much you never want to go back!" he said with a sigh. "And you are making so much money—"

She looked at him ruefully.

"O, Tom, after I pay my board, washing and car fare I will have 25 cents a week. I work until 6 at night and go to bed at 9, and I don't know a soul to speak to. It's very gay!"

The little break in her voice was sweet music to Tom.

"Tomorrow will be Saturday, Bessie. Will you resign and let me take you home tomorrow night? I'd like to make Julia deliver that letter. There is much in it to answer."

"Tom, I did resign. I couldn't stand it any longer."

"And may I take you home?"

"Yes, Tom."

"And will you stay there until I come home in March?"

"Yes, Tom."

"And will you say 'yes, Tom,' to what I asked in the letter—the one Julia did not deliver?"

"I don't know what you asked, Tom?"

"Bessie! You do know!"

"Ye-s, Tom!"

One Is Illegal.

"What is the difference between making money and earning money?" asked the youth.

"Sometimes the difference is a trip to the penitentiary for counterfeiting," answered the home-grown philosopher.

Might Have Missed the Last.

"I suppose you have read Shakespeare's works?" said the young man from the East.

"Yes, all of them," replied Miss Fitz of St. Louis, "that is, unless he has written something within the past year."

Another Point of View.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity," remarked the party with the quotation habit.

"It isn't its use I object to," rejoined the fussy person; "it is its abuses."

1126 South

DICK DORING flung the book into the corner where the evening paper already lay crumpled and despised. Hopefully he glanced at the clock, but the hands were still low on the dial. It was not yet 7:30, though it seemed fully an hour since he had last looked up to see the hands at 21 minutes past.

There were times when Doring liked to sit beside the fire with a book and his pipe, and hear the big drops splash against the sash. But that was when he was comfortable in mind and body, and the suggestion of the discomfort outside hightened the sense of coziness within. Tonight he was not comfortable in mind and this condition was reflected in his physical being.

He had dined early because there was nothing else to do, and now he found the paper dull and the books which, in other times were his favorites, now actually boring him.

He did not feel like dressing and going to the theater—all plays were of love; of love that ended happily, and therefore they were not true to life.

Look at his own experience! Just because he had told Lena Clayton that her newest fall dress made her look 10 years older, there had been a quarrel and for the fifth time she had given back the ring and had burst into tears. There was no longer any novelty in receiving his ring back, and her tears were always an accompaniment to the ceremony.

Before he had always protested his penitence before the first round tear—herald of the flood to come—had made its journey down her rounded cheek. This time he had been thoroughly out of humor with himself, Lena and the world in general. He had slipped the ring into his pocket and had told her that if she wanted it again she could ask for it, as various unpleasant things would happen to him before he would make any more overtures.

So matters had stood for more than three weeks. Dick told himself that Lena would never be the first to

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speak, and he also tried miserably to convince himself that it would be insane to humor her by abasing himself again.

He explained to himself that he was forever apologizing—which was very true—and he neglected to add that always the fault was his—which was equally the truth.

More than once, despite this new determination, he had been tempted to call up. He had even taken up the receiver of the telephone to get a connection, but the voice of the operator who served the switchboard of the apartment house had broken the charm, and he had muttered something about having changed his mind and had replaced the receiver on the hook.

Now he rose from his chair and approached the telephone. The shiny black box held interesting possibilities. In five minutes he could gain speech with Lena without going out into the rain. In five minutes he could set at rest all doubts and worries—or in five minutes he could call Benny Harmer over to play poker. He knew that Belding was in and they could make it a three-handed game and ignore the rain and lovers' quarrel.

He raised the receiver from the hook and gave Harmer's number. In a moment a femiline voice answered and Doring started. He had never noticed before how much like Lena Clayton, Lena Harmer, Ben's sister, spoke. Funny that they should both be named Lena and both should speak alike.

"That you, Lena?" he called. "This is Dick; Dick Doring."

"Dicky, you darling," came in fervent tones over the wire, nearly causing Doring to drop the receiver. 'I knew that you would be the first to speak."

"I say! Who is this?" demanded Doring.

"It's Lena, of course," came the reply. "Lena Clayton, since you seem to know so many Lenas. Whom did you think it was?"

"Lena Harmer," explained Doring promptly.

"Her name is Caroline," cried the one at the wire.

"Benny calls her Lena, you know, though you girls call her Carrie."

"That's too thin, Dicky," came in mocking tones. "The Harmers' number is in the South exchange. This is Main. You couldn't have made such a mistake, neither could central. You called me up and your nerve failed you."

"It's no such thing," declared Doring hotly. "I called Benny up to invite him over to play poker. I gave the number distinctly. Anyway," he added triumphantly, "you spoke first."

"What a fibber!" came in shocked tones. "Why, you called me up."

"But you spoke first," he insisted. "You said 'Hello.'"

"Of course I did," admitted Lena, "but you spoke first when you called my number."

"I didn't call your number," insisted Doring. "I tell you I was trying to get Benny Harmer over to play poker."

"And so you called me up," she retorted. "Did you decide to change the game to—hearts?"

"It is a pretty good game on a lonely night like this," said Doring. "If you'll admit that you spoke first I'll come over."

"I won't do any such thing. How do you know that I want to have you over here?"

"Don't you?" pleadingly.

"That's telling," teased Lena. "Why don't you ask if you may come and find out?"

"Because I said I was going to wait and make you speak first," he explained. "Of course, now that you did speak first, I don't mind telling you that I saw you yesterday in the new dress and you look stunning."

"Do you really think so?" asked the girl. "It's an awfully pretty dress and it makes me look five years younger."

"An error of 15 years, all told," declared Doring, "but you haven't asked me over yet."

"You haven't asked to come, and you can't come until you admit that you called up and that's speaking first."

"Let's call it a tie," he suggested. "I didn't call you, you didn't call, so we neither of us spoke first."

"If you didn't call me, then ring off, and you can get the wire you wanted. I'll hang up the receiver."

"Don't do that," pleaded Doring. "I guess—well, I didn't call up, but I'll say I did. I guess I wanted to and—well

I—I spoke first. Now, may I come over please?"

"If you will be a very good and polite little boy perhaps I'll let you come and—and make up."

The boy on duty at the switch board looked up, as Doring paused before the desk.

"What was that number I called a little while ago?" he asked.

"You called 1126 south, but I guess I done give you that number in main you always calls up," announced the boy. "I'm sorry I made a mistake, Mr. Doring."

"I'm not," announced Doring as he passed over a bill. "You got the right number, even if it was wrong."

An Expert

AGNES CARVER regarded her mail with a little shudder of disgust. It was heavier than usual and she was in no mood for wading through a mass of false sentiment and untutored pleading.

She smiled a cynical little smile as she drew the chair up to the desk and reached for the slender blade of steel that she used as an envelope opener.

The mail this morning was the usual mixtures of pathos and nonsense, but over one she paused a long time before she put it aside, because it seemed so very like her own case. She took it up again when the routine letters were cared for, and leaning back in her chair she reread it half a dozen times.

"I love a young man who some day promises to become famous," it ran. "At the present time I am making almost double the money that he does, there is a chance that he may become a great success. At the same time, there is the possibility that he will not gain this success, in which case I should be the more successful. Would you advise me to marry or wait and see how it all turns out?"

It differed very little from scores of propositions she had decided almost off hand, and yet the letter fascinated Agnes, for she had felt the same dread herself that Ned Darlington might not gain the success that he deserved and that she might outdistance him in the race for fame.

She had felt that she could not bear to see Ned struggling along while she forged ahead, and she had told him so when she had joined the staff of The Daily Solar. There had been talk then of great things that were to be done for her, and Ned had bluntly demanded that she choose between a career and himself.

She had chosen the career, to regret it ever after, for he had flung himself out of her presence and she had not seen him since. She had heard that he had gone west, but they never had had friends in common and none of her acquaintances could tell her anything of his whereabouts.

She pondered over the letter until the striking of the clock warned her that she must get to work, so, laying the letter aside, she reluctantly raised the cover of her desk and slipped a sheet of paper into the machine.

Rapidly she answered the more promising of the other letters, then she stopped and again took up the case that was so like her own. She was still looking at it when one of the copy boys stopped at her desk.

"Mr. Veit says he'd like to have your copy if it's ready, Miss Carver," he announced. "He wants to get the department stuff in early to leave the machines free for the murder trial."

"In just a moment," she promised, with a guilty glance at the clock, and then, with an abrupt little gesture of determination, she faced the machine again and wrote rapidly.

She turned the copy in and hurried uptown to a club meeting to which she had been assigned, but through the day the letter and her answer haunted her thoughts and she could not cut them from her mind.

It spoiled her sleep too, for she could only toss uncomfortably through half the night and rose with heavy spirits and leaden head in the morning. In the hope of gaining some relief she started to walk down the avenue to the office.

She had scarcely turned the corner nearest her apartment than she came to a dead halt, for coming toward her was the man whose image had been revived so strongly by the letter.

For an instant she thought that it was all a part of the walking nightmare in which she had spent the past 24 hours, but the next moment Ned Darlington was shaking her hand with a grip that was anything but ghostly.

"I've been here a whole week," he cried jubilantly, "but there were some things to be done before I looked you up. I was coming to call this morning. I did not suppose that you left the office before 10 at least."

"I was not feeling well and I thought that a walk might do me good," she explained, and Ned turned and suited his pace to hers.

"Then by all means let us walk," he agreed gayly. "It's been a long time since we used to walk together, Agnes. I suppose that you don't mind walking with a man in a hat like this?"

"You look like a cowboy; but you're not a cowboy to be ashamed of," she said with admiration. "You seem to have stretched out and up, Ned. Only your face is not changed."

"Prosperity," he explained. "After we had our last talk I came to the conclusion that you were going to be a better newspaper woman than I ever could be painter, so I scraped my dollars together and went west. I happened to stumble against a very real mine and I'm worth a pot of money now. Are you still sticking to your old job and telling the lovelorn what they want to know?"

"That is only a part of the work now," she explained. "I can't seem to get rid of it."

"And you are still telling them what you would do yourself?" he asked referring to the platform on which Agnes had taken her stand when the work was first given her and which he had declared would never do.

"I am still giving real advice," she said with an attempt at her old gaiety.

"Then we'll go in here and get the ring," he announced abruptly as they came to a hault before a famous jewelry store.

"What ring?" she asked in confusion.

For an answer Darlington drew from his pocket a folded paper and pointed to the home page displayed on the outside.

"I guess you wrote that," he said quietly. "I was afraid that you might guess that I had the question sent in and chuck it into the waste basket. The girl stenographer at the hotel wrote it for me."

Agnes glared at the answer that

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had stirred her so strongly. In a half dozen sentences she had advised the writer that if a man could support her it was better that she should abandon her career than that it should interfere with her love.

"That's advice from an expert," reminded Ned exultantly. "Are you ready to follow your own advice?"

The Real Attraction.

English Girl—"You American girls have not such healthy complexions as we have. I cannot understand why our noblemen take a fancy to your white faces."

American Girl—"It isn't our white faces that attract them, my dear; it's our greenbacks."

The Ground Rents.

Homer—"So you were in Japan, eh? Is real estate high there?"

Travers—"Not very, but the ground rents are something awful."

Homer—"How do you explain that if land is cheap?"

Travers—"Earthquakes."